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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, April 17, 1933;

U. S.

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Subject: "Spring Greens." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics,
U. S. D. A.

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The other day at our house we got to talking about food treats, favorite dishes of the year. Of course, somebody mentioned the Thanksgiving turkey. And somebody else spoke of the Christmas plum pudding. When it was Uncle Ebenezer's turn, he voted for spring greens.

"Anybody who's lived as long as I have will remember that the sight of the first big bowl of steaming dandelion greens in the spring actually brought cheers from everybody at the table. The family fell to and simply devoured those weeds gathered from the fields and fence rows. The wild greens at our house weren't always dandelions either. My grandmother knew of a score of plants -- "potherbs," she called them -- that made delicious greens when they were just up in the spring and still young and tender. You youngsters don't remember those days before we had modern canning and refrigeration to provide green foods the year around. All winter long we had to content ourselves with the vegetables that we could either store in the cellar or preserve by drying. So root vegetables, cereals and meat were the chief items on the menu. That was why the first greens in the spring were such a big treat to everybody."

Uncle Ebenezer paused a minute in his story and then continued: "Of course, old-fashioned housekeepers had never heard about minerals and vitamins. Just the same, they knew from experience that greens not only tasted good but also were good for the health of the family. My mother often used to say that spring greens were nature's tonic for winter ills. You just ask your modern nutritionists if she didn't have the right idea. And another thing. She knew how to cook them to the queen's taste. She didn't preach to us that we must eat those greens because they were good for us. She made them so delicious that we couldn't help eating them."

I think Uncle Ebenezer's story has several morals in it worth following, don't you? Greens, both wild and cultivated, are still some of our best foods. At this time of year when the tender wild greens are just coming up you can go out and dig your own greens and have them tender and fresh to serve your family without cost. If you live in town, probably your market has greens from fields and gardens brought in by country people and for sale at a very small price.

Properly speaking, "greens" is the term for all the green leafy vegetables both those that are cooked and those like lettuce that are generally eaten raw for salads. But to many people the word "greens" still means the leaves of plants like dandelion, mustard or spinach and the green tops of beets and turnips, which are usually cooked.

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Salad was something new in the food line only thirty or so years ago. Of course, cole slaw had been popular for many years. But the idea of serving greens, and vegetables, or fruits, dressed with oil and vinegar and seasonings as a course at dinner was a real novelty. Salads came in about the time food specialists were learning the importance of green foods to health.

At first we considered greens most valuable for the minerals they contained, especially for their calcium and iron. Now we depend on them for both minerals and vitamins. In a balanced diet, green leafy vegetables supply most of the vitamin A and the vitamin C. They also furnish Vitamin B and G. And here's one interesting point to remember. The richer the green in a leaf, the more vitamin A it will contain. That's why the deep green outer leaves of lettuce offer more food value than the pale white hearts.

Now about cooking greens. The good cook nowadays believes in saving food value, flavor and color. Her aim is to cook the greens so they will keep as much of their minerals and vitamins as possible, so they will look tempting when they come on the table and so they will taste good enough for a second and third helping. Here's how to do it. First, pick over the greens and discard imperfect leaves. Then wash them thoroughly. Lift them in and out of several washing waters, if necessary. Then drop them in a small amount of boiling, salted water. Specialists advise using only enough water to keep them from scorching in order to save the minerals and vitamins that otherwise would be lost in the water. Some greens like spinach and dandelions will need no cooking water except that which clings to the leaves after washing. Cook the greens in an open kettle -- no lid -- to save the green color. And cook until just tender. The very young tender leaves need little more cooking than enough to wilt them. The larger leaves with firm stems and fibers you can cook until just tender and then drain and chop before serving. After cooking, be sure to drain your greens well. Soupy greens are most unappetizing. Still another way to cook greens is to pan them. Crisp some salt pork or bacon in a hot skillet. Then put in the greens and turn them over in the hot fat until they are wilted and are well seasoned with the salted fat. The stronger flavored greens like kale or wild leeks are good served in cream sauce. Some people like greens seasoned with sour cream. Others like them served in hot boiled salad dressing. Among the seasonings used to make greens savory are salt and pepper, of course, and vinegar, melted butter, onion juice or chopped onion and even minced green pepper. A combination of two or more greens such as field cress and spinach or beet and turnip greens, or mustard and corn salad makes an excellent dish when seasoned with bacon fat or with butter and chopped onion.

Just time now for our Monday economy meal. Broiled ham; Mashed potatoes; Savory greens, either wild or cultivated; Bread and Butter and for dessert, Canned apple sauce.

Tomorrow: "Ways farm women are economizing."

